SOCIALIST STUDIES.....

No 5.

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OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Communications to:

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SOCIALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS

Socialists are frequently asked by members of the self styled militant left: What have you done for the working class? The question demonstrates their ignorance of what constitutes Socialism and the requirements for its establishment, for Socialism by its very nature can only be brought into being by the working class.

Socialism is not a piecemeal reform of capitalism realised by fighting for isolated issues, which even if successful, would leave the nature of capitalism unchanged. For example, even successful demands for higher wages and better conditions still leave the wage labour to capital relationship intact, and thus the class structure (worker to capitalist). Socialism will be a society with entirely different relationships to those of capitalism. Capitalists, who today when market conditions are right for exploitation and capital formation to take place, become willing to employ workers, will cease to exist. Socialism will not have a class structure. Members of society will work, if they are able, to produce the goods and services that the community has indicated that it requires. Goods will not be produced because their anticipated sale will realise a profit but because society needs them.

This production for use and not sale will require a different system of distribution. There being no commerce, i.e. money, banks, credit etc., and need being the only requirement for consumption, distribution will be merely a physical process,for which capitalism has already provided the means

The social relations of Socialism being distinctly different from those of capitalism require that the working class understands the need for them, so that it can institute and operate them. Members of society cannot institute and operate that which they do not understand. Finding employment and fighting for higher wages cannot bring about the realisation that Socialism will abolish both employment and wages. For the same reason leaders cannot lead an ignorant working class into a Socialist society.

When Socialism is established it will become the dominant system of society worldwide in the same way that capitalism currently is. Its establishment requires that the means of production and distribution (factories, mines, transport etc.) must be developed to the point where the needs of the community can be met. Also the majority of the working class must understand the need for , and have the will to establish Socialism. Over the last 200 years capitalism has developed the means of production on an increasingly world wide scale and there now exists the potential to produce sufficient wealth to satisfy society's needs. What is now required is a working class which is conscious of the need to establish Socialism, and has the desire to do it.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has consistently put to the workers that only they, the working class, can establish Socialism. No leader can give it to them. We have persistently urged the working class to study our analysis of capitalism, and we have promoted our party as the instrument through Parliamentary action to abolish capitalism in order to establish Socialism.

Due to the uneven geographical, industrial and commercial development of capitalism, the working class throughout the world is at different stages of political consciousness. The need for the working class to recognise that they alone can establish Socialism has been seriously retarded by the Social Democratic, Labour and so called Communist parties, supported by their self styled left wing militants. These parties have encouraged nationalism by urging workers to fight and lay down their lives for their national capitalist class; they have promoted nationalisation (state capitalism) as Socialism and thus confused the true nature of Socialism to the point where many workers think that they know what it is and reject it; they have organised campaigns and advocated reforms which at best can only have, if successfull, a short term advantage to a section of the working class, but which give long term advantage to sections of the capitalist class. Through advocating the idea that capitalism can be made to work in the interests of the working class, these parties direct the attention of the working class away from the need to have only one aim.... the establishment of Socialism.

All the left wing parties have mislead, confused, and have done a disservice to the working class. Workers have been killed, died, suffered illness, disease, poverty and insecurity in their millions through following their leadership...and this without one problem facing the working class being solved.

THERE IS NO BLOOD ON OUR HANDS.

THE ANARCHO SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE STATE

The anarchists have found a new ally in the Clapham Socialist Party. Both are agreed that the state must be abolished immediately:

> "This Conference affirms that Socialism will entail the immediate abolition of and not the gradual decline of the State." (Conference Resolution 1984)

Anarchists, at least those who are consistent, hold the view that the State is the source of all of the problems of the working class and that the entire system of capitalist exploitation exists because of the State. The Clapham Socialist Party on the other hand, has members who openly write for anarchist organisations on a regular basis. According to the "Discussion Bulletein" (an American anarchist journal) published in the U.S.A. .."The core group of Spanner" (British anarchist journal) "is anarcho-socialist and emanates from a faction of the S.P.G.B." (The Socialist Party at Clapham) "and indeed some of its members remain members of that party, though under the terms of the Hostility Clause in the S.P.G.B. principles there is a danger if not a probability that they will be expelled." (P.17 Discussion Bulletein No.4 , Sept/Oct 1991).

The Discussion Bulletin is out of date. It is agreement with the principles of the Socialist Party which now invites expulsion, not disagreement; therefore the anarchists in the Clapham party need not fear for their membership, because now the Socialist Party only expels genuine socialists.

This disagreement with its own principles, expressed in the above Conference Resolution, has lead the Clapham socialists straight into the anarchist camp. They now seek support for the immediate abolition of the State.

Apart from being absolute nonsense, this proposition is bound to attract support from anarchists. The Socialist Party of Great Britain's position on the State is broadly similar to that held by Marx and Engels. In a letter to Van Patten dated 13th April 1883 (immediately after Marx's death) Engels wrote as follows:

> "The working class must take possession of the organised political power of the State and by its aid crush the resistance of the capitalist class and organise society anew.....This State may require very considerable alterations before it can fulfill its new functions."

Our Declaration of Principles puts forward precisely the same idea in principle 6. We have never held the view that the political state can exist in Socialist society. The S.P.G.B. agrees with Marx and Engels that with the disappearance of classes there "also disappears the necessity for the power of armed repression or state power." (From the above letter). The State will therefore in due course "wither away".

> "State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and by the conduct of the processes of production. The State is not "abolished" it dies out"
> (Engels Socialism Utopian & Scientific Chapter 3)

Lastly there is the question of converting the instruments of oppression into the agents of emancipation. This is quite a simple issue.

It is necessary for a socialist working class to gain political control, but only for the purpose of dispossessing the capitalist class and opening the way for the community as a whole to take over the means of production and distribution and democratically use them for the good of all. The State, with its coercive machinery will be dismantled as its function -- the custodian of private property-- will have disappeared. New social institutions of administration based on the new social conditions will be democratically formed.

NOTICE TO READERS & CORRESPONDENTS

Subject to considerations of space we are prepared to publish correspondent's letters. However we cannot undertake to publish every letter we receive. Editing may be necessary and we would urge correspondents to keep letters short, to the point and pertaining to the Socialist case.

Socialist Studies is still distributed freely to all who request it and, as a journal, it is still in its infancy. We have plans to enlarge it but this may involve making a small charge to cover the cost of production.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

NORTH WEST LONDON BRANCH meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays in month. 7.30pm Abbey Community Centre, Belsize Road NW6. Secretary C.May, 71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, N12

CAMDEN/BLOOMSBURY BRANCH meets on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday in month, 6pm, at the Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, WC1. Secretary L. Lestor, 31 Caernarvon Road, Eynsbury, St Neots, Cambs, PE19 2RN.

PRINCIPLES OR OPPORTUNISM:

SOCIALISM OR

LEFT WING LIBERTARIANISM

In an article 'What is Sectarianism', endorsed by his branch of the Socialist Party at Clapham (SP) and published in Discussion Bulletin, an American anarchist journal, Mr. Steve Coleman derides those members of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (S.P.G.B.) who adhere to the Object and Declaration of Principles and who are concerned with "its past, its customs, its identity, its title..." (P 10). In doing so he raises a number of important questions to consider. Are these attributes he ridicules really important for a political party whose Object and D. of P. has historically singled us from the anti working class policies of the Labour Party and left wing organisations or groups? Are such qualities that Coleman attacks part of the Marxian tradition of the class struggle? And do they assist or hinder political action and the propagation of Socialist ideas?

THE PAST

It has been said that those who control the present have the political power to re-write the past and determine the future. Academics attempt this through the re-writing of history to suit the class interests of their employers. During the 1930's, the Communist Party rewrote working class history under directives from Stalin and the Russian ruling class; its authors writing as though the SPGB had never existed. The historians of the left who graduated from the universities in the 1960's and 1970's did likewise. Praise for James Maxton of Independent Labour Party (ILP) who defended capitalism, but silence on the role of the S.P.G.B. in opposing him. Convenient lapses of memory over William Morris's political affiliations with the Fabians and other groups proposing reform programmes and eulogising the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), DeLeon, Industrial Unionists and the Socialist Labour Party as though these political parties were immune from internal contradictions and external criticism by the S.P.G.B. at the time.

So the past does matter. It is part of the political battle ground of the class stuggle. The Socialist Party of Great Britain founded in 1904, recognised this in their pamphlet 'The Communist Manifesto and the Last 100 Years' published in 1948. Not only is the SPGB's criticism of the Second International documented, but they also declared:

> "From 1904 until 1914 the Socialist Party, in complete independence and isolation carried on the work it had set its hand to of advancing Socialism as the only remedy for the manifold evils that afflicted the workers." (P.29)

'Complete independence' meant hostility towards all forms of 'direct action'. Direct action ignores the reality of the State under capitalism and the use the capitalists' agents will make of its coercive force if any insurrection, mass strike or economic disruption occurs. It is all very well for armchair revolutionaries to 'applaud' workers being massacred in China, Rumania or elsewhere from the safety of their television set, but it brings Socialism no closer. In the case of China it left the ruling class intact and in Rumania replaced one ruling class with another. Socialism was no nearer in either case. This opposition to direct action is documented in the Socialist Standards of the old S.P.G.B. In an article critical of Industrial Unionism and the IWW entitled 'The Collapse of Direct Action' (SS April 1909, the writer concludes:

> "...It is,...,inevitable that the neo-Anarchist movement, in every country in which it appears soon begin to fall to pieces of its own unsoundness and futility; while it is equally inevitable that the Socialist Movement should..., advance steadily and surely even if slowly, step by step, nearer to its triumph."

The continued silence by those controlling the current SS, of the S.P.G.B.'s past rejection of all forms of direct action and the SP's own propagation of the anarchist dogma of 'the immediate abolition of the State' as the basis of this organisation's political programme highlights its own 'unsoundness and futility'. Not only is this trend a clear indication of the SP's repudiation of Clause 6 of its Principles which calls on the working class to 'organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national

and local...' but it is also the abandonment of the Marxian theory of the class struggle as a political struggle to gain control of the machinery of government in order to abolish private property ownership and its replacement with Socialism. And for what? Merely to facilitate the opportunity to affiliate the Socialist Party to the so called 'libertarian left' via 'academic conferneces', the publication of books and journals, joint forums with known and unknown opponents of the S.P.G.B. and guest appearances by anarchists and Utopian idealists on the same political platform.

The past is therefore important for it gives the lie to those who wish to place the S.P.G.B. in the same tradition as DeLeon or the S.L.P. It is also interesting to note that the S.P.G.B. is taken to task for being 'sectarian' in placing an importance on the past when so many of the 'libertarian left' are busy writing uncritical books about such a past, like the authors of Non-Market Socialism in the 19th and 20th Centuries who deliberately ignore and distort the S.P.G.B's valuable contribution to Socialist thought and working class history; in its hostility towards all forms of direct action and the need for political principles where the democratic end determines the means and for the machinery of government to be 'converted from an instrument of oppression into an agent of emancipation'.

CUSTOM

For a political party whose democratic practice is supposed to foreshadow the society we wish to establish, the 'custom' of the S.P.G.B. is important. Unlike other parties we have always placed a great emphasis on open debate with opponents, open meetings, opposing secrecy and rejecting shared 'forums' as a confusing and opportunist tactic. It has always been a convention of the S.P.G.B. that discussion and argument are face to face rather than through plots. Also language has been plain and honest prose. Socialist propaganda fails if it misleads workers, more so if it cannot be defended. Such an example can be seen from the Socialist Party's journal the Socialist Standard where a writer asserts: "We are always on the side of workers in every situation" (Sept. 1991). Not only does the statement conceal what the writer has in mind but the SP does not have the courage to elaborate on what it means. This has never been the case with the S.P.G.B. whose support for workers' action within

trade unions is conditioned by its being in the interests of the working class as a whole.

The custom of the S.P.G.B. is derived from its principles and also ensures internal democracy, and this has meant no leadership within the organisation. Such a practice sets us apart from capitalist politics (the acrimonius property and policy disputes between sections of the capitalist class and their agents). Unlike the other parties with their Machivellian 'tactics', workers who come into contact with us are under no illusion where we stand on questions of the day. The S.P.G.B. will only admit committed and principled Socialists to membership, unlike the Clapham party which contains opportunists, anarchists and reformists. The S.P.G.B. refuses to abandon principles for the sake of illusory 'growth'.

IDENTITY

The identity of the S.P.G.B. emanates from its dissemination of Socialist principles. This identity between the party and its principles was again outlined in the discussion of the party's history in the 1948 pamphlet quoted above:

> "The Object and Principles that were laid down by the founders of the Party.... have remained to this day a clear and concise statement of the basis of the organisation, admitting of neither equivocation nor political compromise with the enemy for any purpose however alluring."

The Object and Declaration of Principles give identity to the S.P.G.B. and for good reason:

> "Here is no flirting with reforms nor false and soothing catchwords to enlist the sympathies and support of those who lack political knowledge but...., a straightforward statement of the essentials of the working class position under capitalism and the only road to its solution - the capture of political power by a working class the majority of whose members understand what Socialism means and want it. (P.29)

This is why the S.P.G.B. does not court the libertarian left in the

ignorant belief that 'they speak the same language as us'. They do not. Just what has the S.P.G.B. got in common with the anarchist direct action groups listed in Discussion Bulletin ? Do these groups exist to tell the workers of the necessity to gain control of the machinery of government before trying to set up Socialism? Do they exist to establish a society based upon common ownership and democratic control of the means to life by all of society? Of course not. They are merely Utopian idealists without a coherent set of principles nor a political programme informed by a definite object. Given the current low level of class consciousness among the working class and the need for workers to freely accept and understand the case for Socialism, it is vital that the S.P.G.B. adheres to its principles and that it is indentified with a definate course of political action in order to capture political power from the capitalist class. This identity guarantees survival when most groups are thrown unceremoniously into the dustbin of history.

TITLE

Like the Declaration of Principles the name of the Socialist Party of Great Britain is equally important. The title has historical significance in terms of its formation by working class men and women, of its soundness in opposing the War in 1914 and again in 1939, of its hostility towards Russian capitalism since 1917 onwards and its refusal to compromise its principles. Once you abandon the name of the S.P.G.B. you abandon the important context in which it was formed in 1904 and reconstituted in June 1991: its opposition to reform programmes; its hostility towards other political parties 'whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist' and its insistence on Parliament as the seat of power to which Socialist delegates must be sent by a Socialist majority to ensure that the State is not used to prevent production and distribution being put on a Socialist basis.

Without doubt the S.P.G.B.'s past, its custom, its identity and its title are derived from its principles. They are bound up together and cannot be separated. So rather than being 'sectarian' they provide the foundations for a sound theoretical and practical working class politics.

So what is Mr. Coleman trying to say? At one level his use of the term 'sectarian' is one of abuse. As such it is irrelevant and unimportant. But at another level it is an attack, through the use of word play upon the principles of the S.P.G.B. particularly Clause 6, which rejects any form of direct action, and Clause 7 which declares hostility to every other party. For those in the SP who want to make overtures to the libertarian left, these clauses are a stumbling block. But Mr. Coleman cannot attack them directly, but instead attacks those members of the S.P.G.B. who do take political action on the basis of such principles. In this respect it is a deceitful piece of writing. The condition of membership to the S.P.G.B. is the agreement with all of the clauses of the Declaration of Principles. In a later letter to his E.C. Mr. Coleman describes those who agree with and act in accordance with these principles as an "anti -socialist sect" and members as "callous political oafs". Such is the price of holding principles!

But if you believe that the D. of P. in total or in part is a hinderence to the class struggle and Socialism what are you going to put in its place? The answer it seems, if the authors of Non-Market Socialism, of which Mr. Coleman is a contributer, are to be believed, is nothing. The lead Manifesto written by John Crump in the above book is clear evidence that the libertarian left do not concern themselves with principles or political programmes, but are content to entertain a plurality of political ideas, pushing any question of how Socialism is to be achieved to the periphery. However, if you are going to merely contrast capitalism with Socialism without at the same time presenting any practical means of establishing Socialism, then you have passed into the realm of Utopianism, forced to argue in terms of a superior 'human nature', or for a higher ethical sensitivity between life under capitalism and within Socialism. Such an idealist train of thought was dealt with by Engels in his pamphlet Socialism: Utopian and Scientific where he dismissed such thinking as:

> "a mish mash of such critical statements, economic theories pictures of future society by the founders of different sects as excite a minimum of opposition; a mish mash which is the more easily brewed the more definite sharp edges of the individual constituents are rubbed down in the stream of debate like rounded pebbles in a brook." (P.49).

As a Marxian political party it is the S.P.G.B. who present the working class with a scientific analysis of capitalism, which is based upon the class struggle and the need to capture power in order to dispossess the capitalist class of its ownership, allowing society as a whole to take over the means of production and distribution and democratically use them in the interests of everyone. This is something the libertarians and self styled left do not exist for, and neither does the Socialist Party.

But if we are to stand or fall with our Principles what future have those who deride us? They have a major problem which is that as opportunists they can do alot of things within a political party as has been shown. They can enter by subterfuge or on false pretences; they can hold secret meetings and pack out conferences with their supporters; publish politically illiterate manifestos; plot against other members; drive others out by abuse and tactics; misuse the rule book in pusuit of anti-socialist ends and stop opponents' meetings through threats and intimidation. Opportunists can and have done all these, but there is one thing they cannot do. That is to organise as Socialists within a principled political party working for the establishment of Socialism. In this country the task falls upon the Socialist Party of Great Britain and no-one else.

SPEAKERS TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS

We are prepared to send speakers to all organisations who are interested in our case. T.U. branches, political organisations, students' unions etc. No charge is made.

OUTDOOR MEETINGS at Speaker's Corner, Hyde Park, on Sunday mornings, approx 11.30 to 1.30, and subject to availability of speakers an afternoon session 3pm to 6pm.

EXPULSIONS AROUSE INTEREST

A short article appeared in the paper Socialist on 11th March 1992 concerning the expulsion of members from the Socialist Party in May 1991 and the subsequent reconstitution of the Socialist Party of Great Britain in June 1991. We reprint below the quoted comment of the Socialist Party's spokesman;

> 'A spokesperson for the Socialist Party said most of the break-away group were "in their eighties and nineties" and tended to be dismissive of feminist, gay and black issues the party had increasingly taken up in recent years. "I think they were just uncomfortable in the organisation" he added.'

A member of ours (aged under 50) sent in the following reply which to date they have not seen fit to publish:

> 'I was interested to read the article by Dave Osler on the split in the S.P.G.B. As one of the expelled members I would like to respond to the comments quoted by the Clapham Socialist Party's spokesman. He says we are mostly "in their eighties and nineties". This is inaccurate and anyway irrelevant, but the implication is that we have lost our wits and are out of touch, which is not the case. As for being "dismissive of feminist, gay and black issues", I do not know which issues he has in mind, but I can state that my comrades and I fully agree that Socialism will entail "the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex" (Clause 4 of our Principles)
>
> 'But of course we were not expelled for any disagreement with the party's Object and Principles...rather the reverse. Members who no longer agreed with the principles expelled us because we were an embarassment to their desire to broaden the appeal of the party, which in real terms means flirting with and supporting non socialist political activity in an attempt to become popular. The stated reason that we were expelled was that we were "undemocratic" because we insisted on using the party's name for meetings ie The Socialist Party of Great Britain. There was nothing in the charge about being too senile or racist.

'Now that we have reconstituted the S.P.G.B. the Clapham Socialist Party pretends: a) that we do not exist b) that we soon won't exist c) that they are safeguarding the name of the party by attempting to disrupt or get cancelled our meetings and advertisements. They also seek to get hold our branch funds....

'With us out of the way they are now free to take up as many issues as they feel comfortable with, but they are undoubtedly going in a different direction from that envisaged by the founding members in 1904. Meanwhile we shall continue with our work for Socialism and nothing but.'

Time will tell which is the party of principle.

CHALLENGE TO DEBATE

We challenge all political parties to debate their case with us. We include left wing groups, anarchist groups, CND, womens lib and religious organisations. Such debates to be formally held between appointed representatives of each organisation.

LITERATURE AVAILABLE

Socialist Studies Nos 1 to 4
Turmoil in Russia
Election Statement April 1992
Questions of the Day : Inflation

Marxian Classics

Socialism Utopian & Scientific, Wage Labour & Capital, Value Price and Profit

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APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP must signify their agreement with the Object and Declaration of Principles. Apply either by post or by attending any of the Branches listed (P.6)

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

OBJECT

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

ALL ENQUIRIES AND APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP TO...
The Socialist Party of Great Britain,
71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, London N12 8SB